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ABSTRACT

Making the process-oriented writing center an integral part of the community, as well as of the campus, can be crucial to ensuring its survival. Using students as tutors gives the center free tutoring and the students "hands on" experience. To reach students, the director can provide campus-wide publicity and attend meetings for incoming, ESL, and nontraditional students. The center can also provide help for students from academic disciplines other than English with report and scientific writing, research papers, social science writing, theses and dissertations, letters of application, and resumes, as well as offer study sessions for professional entrance exams. The writing center and the library can work together to develop research modules for students to use in conjuntion with or in lieu of a course on research writing. The center can and should be a force for literacy on campus by conducting workshops geared to specific disciplines, visiting classes to guest lecture on improving writing skills, consulting with departments on evaluation and conferencing, developing materials such as editing guides and style sheets, reading student papers, and conducting surveys. Such projects demonstrate the value of the writing center to the administration deciding the program's fate. Beyond the campus, the writing center can collaborate with high school English departments and with community groups and businesses both to generate additional revenue and to precipitate community-wide literacy. (HTH)

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Outreach: The Writing Center, the Campus, and the Community

It might be argued that Writing Centers have progressed, or evolved, in a straight line. Certainly these centers have evolved in different forms. As Muriel Harris has pointed out, there are two dominant models for this structure: writing labs, which are product-oriented, relying heavily on materials, and writing centers, which are process-oriented, relying on tutorial instruction.[1] So, perhaps we have parallel evolutionary lines for centers and labs. Why this concern for the origins and future of writing centers? Obviously, once a center is established, its survival is not guaranteed. In fact, as a learning resource for students, that center may be outstanding; however, we know that outstanding centers may also fall under the ax. Take for instance, the perils of Phyllis Sherwood's lab at Raymond Walters College, chronicled in September, 1982 issue of the Writing Lab Newsletter. In short, a lab with national exposure cannot be assured of its continuance. Consider the number of centers which are defunct or have undergone more subtle changes: changing the director's role from full-time to part-time, demoting that position to a paraprofessional, or decreasing funding or hours of operation. How do we prevent the possible demise of writing centers then? We must make our writing centers (the process-dominant

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model) an integral part not only of the campus but also of the community. I want to argue, then, that writing centers are not developing linearly but rather cyclically, or in a spiral.

But before we begin on how writing centers develop in a spiral, let me point out that the primary reason why they do and should develop that way--that is how they become an integral part of the campus--should not be linked just to survival. Certainly, we should not be naive about the future of our writing centers; we should ask, "What can I do to insure the center's future?" But I think it highly likely, given the typical personality of the writing center director, that these outreach programs will be an inherent part of the program. As Jeanette Harris has noted, "We are obviously fighters, or we wouldn't be associated with writing centers in the first place."[2] Not only are we fighters, but I think the typical director is competent, humane, and caring; using those qualities, then, the director strives to reach as many students as possible to improve their writing skills, which demands a flexible, diverse program. I also think being associated with a writing center influences a person to develop or increase these "nurturing" attitudes. The CCCC report on Learning Skills Centers found that "Instructors released from a judgmental role and encouraged in an advocacy role were free to make discoveries about learning and teaching and develop different attitudes toward students who were 'failing.' They became sensitized to the crucial role that self-confidence and self-esteem play in verbal behavior, and they discovered that, often, what showed up as writing difficulties can be difficulties in other skills. . . ."[3] In other words, it is the nature of the beast to be a person who can wear many hats, perhaps even as many hats as Dr. Seuss' Bartholomew Cubbins, as Jan Ugan pointed out at a CCCC presentation.[4] Thus,

a writing center directed by such a person will be a center of writing for the English department, the campus, and the community.

Of course, the first priority of a director is to establish a center with a firm foundation. After that, the sky's the limit--or to quote Browning, our "reach should exceed our grasp,/or what's a heaven for." How do we go about reaching the sky? Consider the effect a pebble has when dropped into a pool of water. Surrounding the stone's point of entry are ever-enlarging concentric circles. These circles represent the audiences of the writing center. The center's first responsibility is to the campus, including the students, departmental colleagues (assuming the writing center is in the province of the English department), center personnel, other faculty, and the administration, and finally then to audiences outside the campus. (Pat Bates includes in her public relations circle the category of "colleagues outside the institution."[5])

In a discussion on the liberatory aspects of writing centers at the 1983 CCCC, John and Tilly Warnock pointed out that

> liberatory learning has as its object the empowering of self to act effectively in society by, among other things, developing critical consciousness. One finding of this line of inquiry is that teachers do not empower students by conveying information to them, for what that teaches is how much less the learner knows than the one parceling out knowledge.
>
> Paolo Friere and many writing lab teachers recognize that for people to make progress towards literacy they must see themselves as writers, or, as Friere says, as active agents in their culture.[6]

Thus, the writing center is not a "fix-it" shop. In the writing center at Utah State, there is a poster which reads, "Give a person a fish, and you feed him for a day; teach a person how to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime."

That parallels the mission of the type of writing center I am discussing; we want a student to write for a lifetime.

This personality of the writing center must be quite clear to the center's staff and also to the department, for tutors and faculty alike may be tempted to take the easy road of defining a writing center as a skills lab. Certainly that kind of lab has its advantages, but it is not the kind of lab which will function like the pebble dropped in the water. Let's explore, then, those first circles created by dropping our pebble. At the heart of a center is its staff. We think that by working as a tutor, a student grows intellectually, socially, and emotionally.[7] In short, students who tutor are acquiring an education. What do they learn? They learn about materials (and their development), objectives, learning styles, procedures, and people. We also think they learn more about themselves as people and as writers.(This is an area currently under study; in past research, the emphasis has been on the tutee rather than the tutor.) One way, then, of generating credit for the writing center (a concern for survivalists) is to offer a class in tutoring. Another possibility is to link tutoring in the writing center to another class, such as an undergraduate course in diagnosing basic writing problems, a graduate course on rhetoric and basic writing, or to even an outside department's course such as secondary education's English methods course. The advantages are twofold: the students get "hands-on" experience, and the writing center gets free tutoring. Likewise, graduate assistants might have the same kind of assignment as part of their duties to see another learning mode.

The advantages of such a writing center to the circle of students on campus are rather obvious and have been detailed in numerous articles.

(To reach students, the director should blitz the campus with publicity and also attend meetings for incoming students, ESL students, non-traditional students, and so forth.) These students can use the center for activities ranging from brainstorming to writing about literature, from patterning sentences to organizing essays. Directors can stay on top of their students' writing needs by having them evaluate the center periodically or providing a suggestion box in the center. And by helping students, we help the faculty. For the English Department, those advantages are transparent: composition, creative writing, literary criticism and technical writing.[9]

Of what use can the writing center be to other departments? First, students from academic disciplines outside English should be able to find help in the writing center with report and scientific writing, research papers, social science writing, theses and dissertations, letters of application and resumes, plus study sessions for the LSAT, GRE, and MCAT. Writing center personnel can work directly with specific departments to set up programs for their students. Here are a few scenarios. The Education Department requires their students before student teaching to write a diagnostic essay in the center; that group of essays for the quarter is graded by English faculty using primary-trait scoring, and then those students who lack basic skills in paragraph development, sentence structure, thematic structure, or mechanics make up those deficiencies through work in the center. The Natural Resources Department does much the same thing, only they test at the beginning of a student's career, placing that student, then, in basic writing or the regular freshman program, or even skipping the student to the sophomore level. (That department, trained by English faculty, grades their own students' papers.) Variations on this type of testing are also used in other

departments. With the business communications class, we have set up a series of mastery units, working with that instructor's needs and wants. For the Graduate School, we have a series of workshops designed specifically for students writing theses and dissertations.

Furthermore, the writing center and the library can work together to develop research modules for students to use in conjunction with a course on research writing or in lieu of such a course (another credit-bearing course for the writing center). Through this system, an appreciative library staff can monitor use of their resources and also prevent overuse--and thus destruction--of materials by diversifying their assignments. Such a program has also helped them more efficiently schedule their reference librarians; on the other hand, the English Department has benefitted from the concrete program (including videotaped, cassette-taped, or guided tours of the library; introductory exercises to the library; specific exercises for various academic disciplines), which was funded by sources unavailable to English. Perhaps the most important result of this project--and, in fact, any project in which the English department and another department work together--is the attitude change toward the faculty. As a result, this cooperation can be the basis for a writing-across-the-curriculum program,[10] and the writing center becomes the focal point for that program, influencing faculty across campus to see writing as an important part of their courses.

The writing center can be a force for literacy on campus by conducting workshops geared to specific disciplines, visiting classes to guest lecture on improving writing skills, consulting with departments on evaluation and conferencing, developing materials such as editing guides and style sheets, reading student papers, and conducting surveys. In short, the writing center

functions as a resource center for all faculty, even to offering editing advice to faculty about their writing, such as grant proposals. Perhaps the main drawback to a beginning writing-across-the-curriculum program is the faculty's hesitation to see themselves as teachers of writing, or many times even as writers. It is their duty, however, to provide students opportunities for writing; then the writing center can offer in-service workshops on tips for writing assignments. After all, students who write about the content learn that content better; the writing, however, doesn't have to be "super-correct," an attitude which subtly portrays--and mistakenly--writing as grammar.

In the circle beyond faculty is the administration, those people who can sound the death knell for a writing center or provide support. In order for that support to be given, the writing center must demonstrate its value. A good relationship depends on the director voicing concerns and giving information to the administration while also listening to their suggestions. It is important that accurate statistics on budget and use of the center reach the administration, just as it is important for the center to be a good public relations tool for the university. Research done in the writing center, plus participation in professional meetings, publication, writing center conferences on campus, provide good copy for the institution. Thus, activities such as media publicity, open houses, tournaments (Spelling Bees, Scrabble), creative writing contests, and students' published writing keep the center in the limelight. A writing-across-the-curriculum program--wisely administered--does the same thing as the inclusion of computer programs such as the Writer's Workbench, an impressive program to students, faculty, and administrators. Such a program is also of interest to another group in this circle--the

secretarial and clerical staff. Certainly workshops in effective writing skills would also be helpful to them, a fact evidenced by the number of calls received from them on the writing center hotline.

The outside circle is divided into two groups for our purposes: teachers outside the campus and the community. Often, the relationships between university and public schools and even "town and gown" have been shaky. Take for instance, the metaphors we use: ivory tower and trenches. The writing center, perhaps better than any other service or department on campus, can help to build a skylift between the tower and trenches. Recently, in Utah, admission standards to the University of Utah were set for 1985, suggesting a rigorous study in high school. Utah State chose instead to work from the "grassroots," forming an articulation committee of university personnel in education, English, and math; state language arts specialists; secondary school teachers; and citizens. Then subcommittees for the "Three R's" were formed. The goals of the English subcommittee were to promote communication and understanding between secondary and university teachers. In other words, we tried to remove those excuses heard on both sides: "Aren't they teaching any writing in high school?" and "Who knows what they're doing on the hill; graduate students teach most of the freshman classes." We began quite simply, meeting to brainstorm on questions of importance. We found one question to be on evaluation; consequently, the secondary teachers were invited to campus for a workshop on how college writing assignments are graded, and to see what our typical A, B, and C papers are like. This was not a session to show them how to grade, but to open a door on the mysteries of college courses. From this, they acquired ideas about standards, topics and conferencing techniques. Likewise, the high school teachers invited the college faculty for a similar

presentation, this time using representative high school writing.

Additionally, we "share" consultants who come to campus for workshops and convocations; we also offer a summer workshop with outside consultants for teachers, this year dovetailed with the Rocky Mountain Writing Center Conference so that participants may hear a sampling of papers and workshops from people in writing across the country. Our most successful program, however, has been a series of visitations by high school students to the campus writing center. These students bring their essays with them, and working in the writing center with faculty and tutors, they participate in (often for the first time unfortunately) a one-to-one conference. We also manage during an introduction to the writing center to "push" our writing program and suggest that they keep our university in mind for their college career. We succeed at removing some of the fear and mystery of college by making it concrete through these sessions. After the tutoring sessions are complete, we give them an example of a writing assignment from freshman composition, which becomes the next writing task for their high school writing class. In the future, we plan on visiting the high school, guest lecturing, providing an assignment, and then having the students visit the campus. The students like the feedback from college teachers, and the high school teachers are grateful for the support since our teachers usually reinforce those concepts which the high school teacher has been presenting. Moreover, our English education majors have the opportunity to work with high school students, and this activity also introduces them to high school teachers, and it is an activity they will probably use in their own classes in the future. Another positive outcome of this project is the development of a writing center in our new county high school, beginning this fall and staffed by volunteer faculty from

English and other departments in the high school. The director of the university writing center acts as liaison, offering materials, advice, training, and tutors (initially) but always keeping in mind that the writing center belongs to the high school and those teachers must feel it is theirs in order to insure its survival. With its birth, the cycle begins again in the school: who can we help; how can we improve writing throughout the school; what writing projects will the students enjoy? Summer writing clinics for high school students on campus are also worthwhile.[11]

Finally, there is the community at large. With this group, the writing center has two functions: publicizing writing and teaching writing. The first can be done through radio/TV interviews, speeches, newspaper articles, and displays. Although the director may target specific groups of the community--senior citizens, literary groups, day-care centers (infant literacy), secretaries, businessmen, technical writers, and government workers--it is highly likely that these groups will approach the writing center for consulting or conferences once the writing center's publicity is spread. These groups may want information on writers, creative writing, effective report writing, or editing. The writing center might, then, serve as a hub for providing speakers for them. Indeed, if the director took on all the projects I am suggesting, that person would probably be found at a desk, exhausted, still gripping a pen.

What I have provided is an idea bank for writing center directors; satisfactory results of these projects will depend on many variables--time, energy, funding, locale, and cooperation. When I began this paper, I argued against a linear progression by writing centers. I believe that looking at spiralling audiences provides a heuristic for directors to plan and evaluate.

The future of writing centers may parallel the fate of Miller Williams' "The Caterpiller." In that poem, a little girl watches a caterpiller caught in a circle on the lip of a bowl in the backyard. He goes round and round throughout the day. Later that night, she gets up, goes to the yard, and finds the caterpillar dead in the bowl. Her parent tucks her back into bed, and the poet concludes with the parent's thoughts:

> Stumbling drunk around the rim
> I hold
> the words she said to me across the dark
> "I think he thought he was going in a straight line."

As directors of writing centers, let us see our futures as they should be--a spiral reaching upward.

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[7] Kenneth Bruffee, "The Brooklyn Plan: Attaining Intellectual Growth through Peer-Group Tutoring," Liberal Education, 64 (Dec. 1978), 447-68.

[8] Barbara Anderson and Alice Gillam-Scott, "Those Who Can, Teach: Tutors as Writers," CCCC, Detroit, 17 March 1983.

[9] See Peggy F. Broder, "Such Good Friends: Cooperation between the English Department and the Writing Lab," WPA, 5 (Winter 1981), pp. 7-11, for guidelines and precautions on working with the English department.

[10] For information and writing assignments for writing-across-the-curriculum programs, see James Moffett, Active Voice (Boynton/Cook, 1981), Toby Fulwiler and Art Young, ed., Language Connections (NCTE:1982), and Barbara E. Fassler Walvoord, Helping Students Write Well: A Guide for Teachers in all Disciplines (MLA, 1982).

[11] Tom Waldrep of the University of South Carolina offers these kinds of clinics for high school students.